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The James Connolly Memorial Hospital Electronic Menu Card system

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1. Background

The James Connolly Memorial Hospital (JCM) require an Electronic Menu Card system so that their patients can choose their meals in a more informed and efficient manner. This entails presenting menus to the patients electronically and with an interface that will allow them to choose their meal. The electronic nature of such a system means more options can be incorporated in terms of language and presentation. In addition the system can be accessed anytime so the information will be available in a more timely fashion which will have positive knock on effects in terms of food ordering systems, food wastage etc.

The main benefits are:

- Better menu planning taking into account food tastes and requirements of minority ethnic patients
- Patients know what is available to them from a menu in a language they understand
- More accurate information forwarded to the kitchen in a short timeframe
- Reduction of the paper mountain used at present
- A reduction in the amount of food wasted.
- Chefs can cook food stuff which the patient will eat as they will have the necessary information on time.
- All patients will be able to make a choice for all meals

2. Process used to clarify community partner requirements

A number of meetings were held with community partner where the details of the project were developed. In addition the existing “manual approach” to meal ordering was observed so the integration of an electronic system could be as straightforward as possible. The existing documentation (e.g. menus, rotas etc.) were also obtained and studied to gain an understanding of existing procedures.

3. Agreed specification of project deliverables

It was agreed that the electronic menu card system would be developed as a mobile device application as part of a computing student group project. The deliverables agreed with the partner were as follows:

Mandatory Requirements

- A mobile application that will allow patients in the JCM to logon and see the Meal Menu for the week and make their selections. This information will be collated and dispatched to the kitchen or relevant department.
- Menu Creation/Editing Interface: An interface for the catering department to construct the electronic menu(s)
- The Electronic menu will be universal through language translation options and by making use of universal themes such as pictures.

Optional Requirements

- Link to hospital ordering systems and databases to update stock levels, request food orders, estimate staffing levels etc.

4. Progress to date

Currently the students have developed a thorough understanding of the project by having a number of meetings with the catering department at the JCM. They have also decided on their technical course that will maximise the offering to as many patients as possible. The prototype is currently in development and version 1.0 is expected in January 2015.

5. Reflections on the project in terms of potential benefits to stakeholders.

The project will ultimately be of benefit to the hospital and the students. The hospital have identified areas for improvement in their catering process that this project aims to address. This should result in a meal ordering system that makes life easier for the hospital catering department and patients and eases some of the stress on what can already be a highly stressful environment.

The students involved will gain hugely from this project as they are involved in a real world software development project with a real client and application. This is not usually the norm in student projects so they will learn hugely from that experience as well as learning the technologies and technical skills that the project demands.